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### UNH Experts Available to Comment on What History Teaches About Protests

Robbin Ray

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# UNH Experts Available to Comment on What History Teaches About Protests

Thursday, June 4, 2020

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DURHAM, N.H.—As activists around the world organize protests sparked by the death of George Floyd, and some escalate into more violent conflicts, experts at the University of New Hampshire point to historical parallels between the current Black Lives Matter protests, and other riots and marches like those of the civil rights era in the 1960s.

Jason Sokol, associate professor of history and a nationally known expert on Martin Luther King Jr., can speak about the tumultuous protests of the civil rights movement and King's position on urban riots and violence. Author of "The Heavens Might Crack: The Death and Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.," Sokol says like many of the racial issues today, King's views were more complex than most Americans realize.



**MEDIA RELATIONS**

"He opposed the use of violence, but he was even more passionate in condemning American leaders for their inaction on racial inequality," said Sokol. "King stressed that this neglect was what caused the rioting in the late 1960s writing 'we cannot condone either violence or the equivalent evil of passivity.' After King's death in 1968, African Americans took to the streets—some in violent revolt and others in peaceful and interracial marches. In turn, politicians promised a law-and-order crackdown. Five decades after King's assassination this story seems hauntingly familiar and black lives remain uniquely threatened."

**Sokol can be reached at [Jason.Sokol@unh.edu](mailto:Jason.Sokol@unh.edu) (mailto:Jason.Sokol@unh.edu).**

Kabria Baumgartner, assistant professor of American studies, specializes in 19th century African American culture and history, and much of her work focuses on the social and political realities that shaped African American women's activism in the 19th and 20th centuries. She is the author of "In Pursuit of Knowledge: Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America," which examines school desegregation in the 19th-century Northeast from the perspective of African American girls and women.

"This is not the first time in the last two centuries that we've seen protesting and rioting like this but what is unique is how widespread and coordinated it is," said Baumgartner. "Protesting in the streets can be a highly visible and impactful form of activism, but it's important to back it up with conversations and policies that move the issues forward to create meaningful change. The past teaches us that this type of activism is more successful when coupled with constructive actions like boycotting, petitioning, lecturing, lawsuits and, of course, voting. Just like the civil rights marches in the 1960s, the current Black Lives Matter protests are shining a light on critical human rights issues and making people listen in a way that they may not have before."

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